

## Interview with Douglas Henderson

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR DOUGLAS HENDERSON

Interviewed by: Richard Nethercut

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*Q: This interview is being conducted with Douglas Henderson on April 29, at his home in Weston, Massachusetts. The interview is one in a series being conducted under the auspices of The Association for Diplomatic Studies. The purpose of this interview is to elicit information and background on Ambassador Henderson's career in the Foreign Service.*

Let me begin, Ambassador Henderson, by asking, "How did you get involved in a foreign affairs career?"

HENDERSON: It wasn't a foregone conclusion from my birth and circumstances of my youth that I would go into the Foreign Service. My family background did Provide me some information about foreign lands. My father was in the Philippine insurrection battles and also on the Mexican border and in France during the first World War. My uncle, an engineer, worked in a number of Latin American countries as well as being in France, so in growing up I heard talk about other lands but I didn't have any direct contact nor specific interest in them. I graduated from high school during the depression and for five years I turned my hand at almost anything that would bring me a little income. But then in 1936 through the intervention of one of my high school teachers, I went to Boston University;

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and since I was paying for my own education at the time out of my earnings as a filling station gas jockey, I took a wide range of courses involving history, language and science and art and philosophy. I browsed widely through the liberal arts curriculum. When it came time to graduate I really had no destination in mind and, of course, I consulted with one of my advisers. He asked me if I had ever considered a diplomatic career and I said that I knew nothing about it. He then suggested that I apply to Fletcher School which had only recently, at that time in 1940, opened its doors. I did apply and took my Master of Arts there in 1940-41.

*Q: Could you explain a little bit about the Fletcher School? Its full name, where it's located?*

HENDERSON: The Fletcher School—the full title is—Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. It is located on the Tufts campus and its intent is to give a wide background, as its title suggests, in law, specifically international law; diplomacy, but in diplomacy they have difficulty defining the various elements that go into making up diplomatic curriculum; and the basic element, I would have to say in my day at Fletcher, was economics—international economics. It has since that time widened its scope immensely and I wouldn't dare try to define all the interests which are dealt with in the Fletcher curriculum today. It is a graduate school and a highly selective graduate school with a very closely held number of students at any one time. Through arrangements from the beginning with Harvard University, the students at Fletcher have had access to Harvard lectures and to Harvard libraries; and Fletcher is now trying to expand in that direction too, not only to Harvard but to the other universities and colleges in the Boston area.

At any rate, when I attended Fletcher it was a school of very high academic standards with a very small student body. There were fifty of us in total, and we learned as much from our peers as we did from the professors, as is usually the case. In any case, after that intense year of study one of my brothers, who was a mining engineer, invited me to work in a gold mine that he was running in Idaho at the time. So I spent my summer there in a

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place called Halfway, actually Halfway, Oregon which is on the Oregon-Idaho boundary. I had thought that I would bone up on the Foreign Service exams during the summer, but I was so tired after a day at the mine that I really didn't do much preparation. When I took the exams then in September, I was really relaxed and refreshed and felt that there was no pressure on me necessary to excel in the exams. If I didn't pass them this year I could always try again.

On December 6th, 1941, a Saturday, I was informed that I had passed the written exam and would I present myself in Washington the following January 10th, I believe, for the oral examination. And, of course, December 7th was Pearl Harbor. The following few months were difficult in the sense that I was ready to do whatever I was called upon to do. My father, as I noted, had been in all the wars and he was very militant but he didn't necessarily bring pressure on me to join the Armed Forces. It finally came down to the State Department interceding with my draft board and saying that there were so few Foreign Service Officers in the service at that time that they could not spare even the neophytes and would the draft board grant me an exemption, which was done. So that my whole entrance into the Foreign Service was a series of accidents and chances and misdirections. At any one point I could have gone in quite different directions, so that I was not predestined for the Foreign Service.

*Q: Well, that sounds like a very interesting aspect of your career. Having some posts during World War II, could you characterize that experience? What was it like being in the Foreign Service during the war?*

HENDERSON: My foreign service during the war was basically in Latin America in consular posts and except for my first assignment at Nogales [Mexico], I was on my own. My assignment in Arica [Chile]—I was the only officer and my clerical staff were all Anglo-Chilean. And in Bolivia I did have an American secretary, but the rest of the staff were Bolivian. My recollection of those days is not so much the imminence of war and the enormous gambles that were being made with the future of the nations of the world. We

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were occupied day-by-day with things like immigration and in Arica I was dealing with shipping problems. In Cochabamba we had a very large Axis population of Japanese and Germans. The activities involved were not necessarily vital to the war effort; but, nonetheless, we felt that we had a job to do and we were being asked to do it, and we'd better do it the best way we could.

*Q: Did you feel that you had guidelines as to how to conduct yourself with regard to the Germans, Japanese and Italians, or did you pretty much have to use your own best judgement?*

HENDERSON: There were no guidelines per se. You had to operate the best way you could and use your own best judgement. There was supervision, of course, distant supervision from the Embassy. There were certain standards of conduct. I think I should take a moment to enlarge on that point. The Foreign Service which I entered was small. All officers knew each other, at least by reputation, and they had an unwritten code of conduct. You didn't have to be told what to do and what not to do. There were models aplenty for you in the officers you met as you progressed through the Service. My models in those days were certainly Norman Armour, who at that time was Ambassador in Buenos Aires; and Joseph Grew, who was on my examining panel. There were men like that, and they set a standard and we had to live up to that standard. The guidelines—there may have been guidelines, I was not aware of them. What I was aware of was that this was a very high calling and that the standards of my profession demanded the best that I could do.

*Q: Perhaps you could tell me, during this period, and perhaps after the war, was there a fairly extensive training program, or how did you become a seasoned, professional Foreign Service Officer?*

HENDERSON: Before the war there had been a training program. The model included a short period in the field for, as they called them then, Foreign Service Officers

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Unclassified C. These were really probationary assignments and then a training period in the Department—a short training period in the Department—and then another foreign assignment. But the war ended all that and we were thrown into service sink-or-swim, and we learned on-the-job. I have no brief for either method of training. I survived the sink-or-swim school and I learned from my mistakes; and, fortunately, I had people who, although demanding very high standards of performance from me, made allowance for some of my more egregious errors. The first aphorism which sunk in came upon me in Bolivia when I was in Cochabamba and very zealous in my performance of my duty. And the Ambassador at that time was Walter Thurston, an old-school gentleman. I was in La Paz on consultation, and he asked me into his office and asked me how I felt about the kind of work I was doing and whether I felt I was achieving any goals. I said that I felt that I was not having very much success in doing what I really wanted to do. I felt that the constraints were too limiting. Ambassador Thurston looked at me a moment, and said, “I have to repeat to you the line of conduct which the French Foreign Minister Talleyrand laid down for a young diplomat just starting off in his career.” He said, “Young gentleman, above all, not too much zeal.” I know that sometimes the State Department is called The Good Grey State Department and it is perhaps in today's slang “peopled by nerds”. Nonetheless, I think that for example, the applicability of the maxim “not too much zeal” certainly illustrates what happened to Oliver North, who ignored the maxim.

The question of training never really entered my mind. I had been academically prepared when I entered the Foreign Service, and I was interested in economics and my service during the war had given me very little scope for that; so that when I returned to Washington in June of 1947 I went to Personnel and asked that I be given an assignment which would allow me to develop my background in economics. And more by blind luck than by deliberate design, I was assigned to the Department of Commerce in their American Republics branch. In the course of the three years of my assignment there I became one of about three people in the Foreign Service who had an intimate knowledge

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of the economies and specifically the exchange control systems, and banking systems, of the American Republics as they were then called, and I guess they still are.

In that period I had a very interesting experience—no, it wasn't an experience—it was a chance circumstance which developed into something rather significant. At the time I was working with an inter-agency group made up of Commerce, Treasury, Federal Reserve and State representatives working on treaties of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation. We were specifically working on the development of such a treaty for Uruguay. In the course of it, of course, we came up against the problem of how to relate the overwhelming power of the United States to small countries like Uruguay, and whether there was anything in a treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation which would enable us to assist Uruguay in achieving the development of its economic stability while not damaging its sovereignty.

While we were working on this problem we were called from the White House one morning, and this was just before President Truman's inauguration; and two of the staff members from the White House came over and asked us if anything we were doing could be translated into a statement for President Truman's inaugural address. We worked for about three days developing a statement which we thought encompassed the principal points to be made. One, that the United States, although it had enormous resources, had to recognize that its resources were not infinite and that we could not solve all the problems of the world. That we would work with other countries to assist the developing countries but that unless there were an effort made by the countries themselves, anything we could do would be irrelevant. And second, that our greatest potential for assistance lay in providing technical advice in such areas as education, manufacturing, communications and agriculture. We passed this statement over to our contacts in the White House and then went back to our business of developing a treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation.

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I listened to the radio that morning when President Truman was giving his inaugural address, and I remember that he started enumerating the points of his policies to be followed in his four years in office as elected president. He enumerated points 1, 2, and 3, and I don't remember them, but point 4 was almost exactly the words which we had provided. And that became the Point Four program which in various ways guided U.S. relationships in the economic field with Latin America from the period of 1948 really until President Kennedy's inauguration.

*Q: At which point was there a change in our policy toward Latin America or was Point Four disbanded?*

HENDERSON: Well, no administration really changes policies completely. They have to build on what is there. They will change the names and they may change the emphasis, but in fact some elements of previous programs always persist into new manifestations. This was as true in Eisenhower's day. Eisenhower was very resistant to the Truman programs, but the Point Four program did continue in rather limited and truncated versions but nonetheless we did have advisers in the fields that I named in Latin America.

It wasn't until Vice President Nixon's ill-starred trip around Latin America that President Eisenhower became aware that there was something wrong in our relationships with Latin America. He sent his brother Milton on a fact-finding trip and Milton came back and said, "We've got to be more forthcoming." So that some new programs were introduced under Eisenhower. Specifically the Inter-American Development Bank was an Eisenhower initiative. And there were some soft-loan windows opened, in the International Monetary Fund and in the World Bank at the same time.

When President Kennedy came into office he looked at this array and sent Adlai Stevenson on a trip around Latin America to investigate, and out of that trip was evolved the Alliance for Progress. The difference between the Alliance for Progress and previous programs was a renewed emphasis, which Eisenhower had already started, of turning a

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lot more of the responsibility for decisions affecting their future to the sovereign nations rather than giving them paternal advice. Although the concept was good, it also ran up against one of those preconceived ideas. The people who took up the direction of the Alliance for Progress were people who had more recently been in key positions in the European Recovery Program. Now the European Recovery Program had been based on the concept that we put a pie down and each person at the table received a piece of the pie in agreement with all the others, according to the needs of that particular situation, and they all cooperated in supervising the use of that pie. I'm talking about the eventual \$17 billion that was invested in that program. If a country involved in the program was not making efficient use of what had been allocated to it, it would receive advice and guidance from the other countries. The United States was only one among equals in the entire effort. When we tried to transfer that concept to Latin America, we were up against a different set of circumstances and the concept did not transfer, for several reasons. In the first place, in Europe there was an infrastructure in place, damaged, but in place: communications, trained personnel, the kinds of machinery that are necessary to a technological society. This wasn't, and still isn't, available in Latin America. That is one part of the problem. And the second part of the problem was, and is, that, whereas in Europe, although there are keen rivalries and strong cultural differences, these have been subordinated to the necessities of mutual survival. In Latin America the culture and the society of each country have not been under those survival pressures. There are completely different forces at work and if you were to ask me what the principal force at work in Latin America today is, I would have to say, that it is a question of population migration—a population migration from rural societies, rural areas, into the megalopolises of the countries. And this is the force which is driving Latin America today.

*Q: Ambassador Henderson, where were you when the Alliance for Progress was being launched and implemented?*

HENDERSON: I was in Lima at the time as Economic Counselor and serving with a very brilliant political ambassador, Jim Loeb. Jim, as I say, was highly intelligent but completely



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miscast as ambassador to a developing country. Jim would have been the perfect ambassador to France. He and Charles de Gaulle would have had famous rows and probably accomplished a great deal. Jim could not gear himself to the requirements of a developing society, and unfortunately this led eventually to such a clash of values between the Embassy and the Peruvian military that, although Jim was not declared *persona non grata*, it was felt to be in the best interests of both countries if he were withdrawn. This occurred when a military junta had taken over the government of Peru, and I don't think it's necessary to go into the background of that; but it also leads me to the second aphorism which should be somewhere in the lexicon of Foreign Service officers.

I believe it was Elihu Root who made this pronouncement, which says that in international relations you can never shake your finger after you've shaken your fist. It seems to me that our recognition policy is a question of shaking our fist first and then shaking our finger, and it certainly worked that way in Peru.

But this is aside from the point that you were making which is the question of the Alliance for Progress. I was in the Economic Section. I had been involved with the Point Four program in Lima. The hardly won gains of the Point Four program, particularly the rapport which some of our technicians had established with Peruvian counterparts, were largely ignored by a whole new group of very bright, very aggressive experts—many of them recruited from universities—who were gung ho for accomplishing a great deal in a very short period of time. After all, that was the main thrust of the Alliance for Progress, and the Peruvian culture resists quick change, however it is governed. The Peruvian culture is an Indian culture which is different from the American culture.

Well, we didn't have too long with that transition from Point Four to the Alliance for Progress. Then came the question of a new election, and then a military junta takeover and the breaking of relationships and the resumption of relationships which I had to negotiate. Then the Cuban missile crisis intervened and the U.S. attempted to involve Latin America in joint action. All of these crisis-related issues came up very quickly, in

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rapid succession, in a period of about six months. The ambassador left, and I was there to be Charge and to deal with all the broken crockery resulting from the breaking off of relationships, particularly with a very sensitive, proud military group. It was that period of time which probably brought me to the attention of the Kennedy Administration and which led to my later nomination as Ambassador to Bolivia.

*Q: Prior to going to this assignment in Peru, I believe you were in the Economic Policy Division in the Department of State from 1956 to 1959. Were there developments there that you consider significant?*

HENDERSON: There is one development which illustrates several points that I would like to make. The first point is that the flow of communications from the bottom up is extremely important to the development of sound policy. And when that flow upward gets choked off it is almost impossible to get a true feeling of the nuances of foreign policy. The reason I say this is that in December of 1956 I was assistant chief of the Economic Controls Division, which really was a question of control over strategic materials going to the Soviet Bloc, China and a few related nations including [North] Vietnam. One morning a telegram came across my desk saying that the French had just received a request from the then new Polish government for an exchange of materials.

I've forgotten exactly what the exchange involved, it was coal for something, but that is not important. This would have required a deviation from established policy. Poland was a part of the Soviet Bloc, and we weren't about to engage in trade in any extended way with any nation in the Soviet Bloc. But it seemed to me that there was an opening here. So in the course of that day—that day, mind you, starting at 9:00 in the morning—I wrote out a statement of policy with respect to Poland; and I cleared it at my level in the Department and then with the Department of Commerce and with the Defense Department, raised it to the next level which was the Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, raised it beyond that to Doug Dillon who was then sort of a super-Under Secretary for Economic Affairs, and by 4:00 that afternoon it was before Dulles for approval.

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Now the statement of that policy is very interesting, because what I wrote down was about as follows: That we should offer individual Soviet countries an alternative to complete dependence on the Soviet Union. And that's all it said. We would offer it and it would be an alternative. It didn't say that they had to take it. It wasn't that we were giving them anything. The alternative was there if they wanted to take it. And that became the policy on which the resumption of trade with Poland was based until the time of the crisis over the Afghan intervention. The interesting thing is that later when President Ford tried to paraphrase that, he misquoted it, and was very reluctant to back away from his misquote and waited almost four days. I've forgotten the circumstances, but he said that Poland was not completely dependent on the Soviet Bloc.

*Q: Might this have been in connection with his campaign in 1976 against Jimmy Carter?*

HENDERSON: Yes, that was when it occurred, and it was that misquote which I think may have been one of the elements in Carter's victory offense.

*Q: This is part 2 of the interview with Ambassador Douglas Henderson taking place on April 29th, 1988. The interviewer is Richard Nethercut, a retired Foreign Service Officer.*

Ambassador Henderson before we talk about your period as ambassador, could you describe some advanced training that you may have had in the course of your Foreign Service career?

HENDERSON: The Senior Seminar had only one year of experience when I was given the opportunity to participate in it. It was still in the process of development, and yet I consider that one year the true highlight of my entire professional life. The experience of being daily with very accomplished officers from other elements of the United States Government, the exposure to ideas, disciplines, culture, society, arts, letters, philosophy by the most eminent thinkers and doers in the United States today on a daily basis; but more than anything else, the one time before I became ambassador, when an officer was

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treated as a mature, serious, responsible adult, was the most rewarding time of my entire professional life. I don't know what has happened to it today. I think probably it still is in the old mold. I think it still has a great deal of flexibility and I believe that the standards are still as fine as they ever were. That to my mind is how a training program ought to be run.

That prepared me in many ways which I didn't realize at the time for my assignment to Peru and my confrontation with all the difficulties of dealing with a powerful ambassador and later dealing with the complexities of resumption of relations with a military government. It also gave me a perspective not only on the events themselves, but on my relationship to them. That certainly I had to be responsible, certainly I had to perform well. But eventually I had to understand that there were many people who were also involved and also concerned about the outcome, and that although I was at the focus, that I was not the only one who was responsible for the outcome, and that there were times when I should just sit back and say, "Well, I've done what I can, now its up to others to complete the task."

And that was very good preparation and training for my assignment to Bolivia as ambassador.

*Q: Could you go a little into the background of the circumstances about your selection as ambassador, the time frame in which it occurred, and then what you considered to be your charge as ambassador to Bolivia?*

HENDERSON: The appointment to the Chief of Mission spot in Bolivia is probably a precarious one. In the first place you have to understand, as you must, that Bolivia is not normally considered a plum assignment. The capital city—and about a third of the country—is at altitudes above 10,000 feet; the country is remote in the sense that it's in the High Andes, and the people themselves have a history of, well, let's call it fractiousness, of unstable governments which do not contribute to the peace of mind of any Chief of Mission. As a matter of fact there is an old New Yorker cartoon before the war, about

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1938, in which it shows the typical striped pants diplomat down on his knees before a board of very senior officers, and the diplomat is saying, "But please, I don't want to be ambassador to Bolivia."

But nonetheless, I somehow cherished the notion that I could hope to be ambassador to Bolivia. I had served there for a number of years during the war from January 1944 until June of 1947 in a consulate out in the hinterland. I knew the country well. I liked the people. I speak Spanish fluently, and I spoke and understood enough Quechua, one of the Indian languages, so that it would be a post at which I would have at least some advantage as Chief of Mission.

The fact that the average tour of duty for a Chief of Mission in La Paz, I think, is somewhere short of a year gives some idea how uncertain your career expectancy is when you're assigned to Bolivia. But, because I had been Charge at a difficult period in Lima; and because the then ambassador to Bolivia, Ben Stephansky, had visited with me in Lima a number of times and we had talked about our philosophy of government, and our philosophy of ambassadorial responsibilities and so on; and because the then Assistant Secretary, Ed Martin, had had his attention called to me, not only because of the business of being Charge in Lima but also because Cornell University had asked me to be campus coordinator for their Peruvian extension service—I think that was what really impressed Ed Martin, at least that's what he said to me. It was the first time in his experience that a university had ever looked to a Foreign Service Officer to head up a program for them.

At any rate, whatever the circumstances, when I left Peru (and that was inevitable because a new Chief of Mission, Johnny Jones, had been named and he had to, of course, have a new Deputy Chief of Mission), I had been Charge and obviously I could not make the transition back to being Deputy Chief of Mission. I left Peru in August without an ongoing assignment, only that I was to take some leave which I did. But Ed Martin had hinted to me that I was on a short list for nomination as ambassador to Bolivia. So that in October when

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the nomination actually went forward I had been mentally preparing myself to take on this new responsibility.

And now I have to say something about that. Being ambassador is completely different from any other experience a Foreign Service Officer is likely to have. In the armed forces, for example, an officer is always being given full responsibility for certain assignments. A naval officer, for example, is in charge of his watch, he is in full responsibility. Now, of course, there is an institutional framework and guidelines surrounding him, but nonetheless he is uniquely and individually responsible at that point. A Foreign Service Officer does not have that experience. Wherever he is assigned he is surrounded by an institution which checks his worst mistakes, and which supports him, and insulates him while he is performing his duties. But when you become ambassador all that insulation is gone. You're standing there all by yourself, and it is your mission. Your mission, and whatever happens it is your responsibility.

Now, I arrived in La Paz, but before I arrived in La Paz something dreadful happened. I was sworn in on a Wednesday and that afternoon at 4:00 I presented myself at the White House and sat down with President Kennedy, and he was enormously interested in Bolivia because he had just had a state visit from the President of Bolivia, Victor Paz Estenssoro, and he was thinking of returning the state visit to La Paz. So he was asking me about the facilities for a state visit at La Paz. He was asking me about the altitude. He was asking me about the people. He was tremendously interested in the detail of life in Bolivia. And when I told him that no American Chief of State had ever visited Bolivia, he was determined to return the state visit. The immediately following Friday morning, I was at the World Bank at a luncheon where we were discussing World Bank activities in Bolivia, when an aide came in and interrupted to say that President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas; and at that point I didn't know whether he had been killed or not, but it was quite evident that he had.

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*Q: Then it was under the Johnson administration that you actually went to Bolivia. Was there any change, did you feel, in direction or guidelines?*

HENDERSON: Well, in the first place, after leaving the bank that afternoon I walked back to the State Department and realized that my first act had to be to hand in my resignation as Chief of Mission, since when there's a change of administration from one President to another, the new President must feel free to appoint his own officers, including ambassadors. I sat down and wrote out my resignation, but I was then called by a friend in the Secretary's office who said they had just received word from President Johnson that all ambassadorial appointments made by President Kennedy were confirmed pending further review and that I was to go ahead.

So I did go to La Paz with President Johnson's approval. Nonetheless, I did not have the opportunity of visiting with President Johnson until almost a year later. I wouldn't say that there was an overt change of policy between the Kennedy administration and the Johnson administration. What I have to say is a gut reaction. The spirit of high adventure, of daring, of willingness to do new things and explore new courses of action, disappeared with Kennedy's death. The work continued but there was a spirit that was missing. And a second observation, something that I don't know how it was communicated, but in the year following my arrival in Bolivia I visited—I knew Bolivia fairly well, I knew where I wanted to go, I wanted to go back and see old places that I'd seen years ago and see what had happened—wherever I went there were pictures of President Kennedy with a mourning band around them. How President Kennedy's spirit had communicated itself so effectively in those remote areas still remains a mystery to me, but it is a fact.

Now, typically Bolivian experience. I had been there a week, I hadn't even presented my credentials. Four people from my staff, a Labor Attaché, a couple of people from the Information Office—there were four, I can't remember who the fourth one was—had gone into one of the big mines in Bolivia, Siglo Veinte, a tin mine, at the request of the labor union leaders and they had gone in before I arrived. I arrived at La Paz, I guess it was

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about a Friday, and I was not briefed on the group that had gone in until the following Tuesday. And that Tuesday afternoon the Bolivian government, for reasons which escape me now, arrested two of the mine leaders who had been in La Paz and who were returning to Siglo Veinte—they arrested them on the way back to Siglo Veinte. The four Americans and some German engineers and some Bolivian supervisors were immediately detained by the Bolivian miners in Siglo Veinte and held as hostages in a room above the dynamite warehouse in Siglo Veinte. So that when I presented my credentials to the President of Bolivia I made what must have been one of the most unusual speeches to a chief of state that an incoming ambassador had to deliver. I said, “I have to present the letters of recall of my predecessor, and letters of credence extended to me by my government to your government, and I have to inform your government that my government will hold your government responsible for the lives and property of its citizens now being held hostage in your country.”

Now, the President of Bolivia at the time, Victor Paz Estenssoro, I wouldn't say he was a friend of mine but I had known him when I had been assigned as Consul in Cochabamba, so that it was not a completely strained atmosphere into which I had to deliver this message. He immediately said, “Yes, Ambassador, my cabinet has been meeting on this subject before your coming to the palace, and the Foreign Minister will call on you at your residence at 1:00.” Well, however it was accomplished, we did obtain the release of the hostages, so that my first week as Ambassador to La Paz was a good introduction to my career as Ambassador to La Paz which was “never dull a moment” all the time I was there and which tested all my previous background and training.

I should point out, however, that many Chiefs of Mission have some sort of a notion that they are self-levitating, that they are held up in the air by some individual merits of their own. I never had that illusion. I knew that I was being held up in the air, if indeed I was up there, by a staff that was working constantly to support me and to help me perform my mission, and I was very fortunate in the entire five years nearly that I was in La Paz, which included three complete staff changes. It was one of those coincidences that almost



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seemed not to be coincidences that the top staff, DCM, Political Counselor, USIA Director, and Station Chief—their tours of duty coincided and their reassignments coincided and I had a new staff about every year and a half while I was in La Paz. But I was very fortunate. I had superb officers. I had intelligent officers. It seems to me nothing short of, well, I was going to say a miracle, but its not a miracle, it is very impressive that the United States can field in posts like Bolivia such a high caliber of American officer personnel, and that includes not only the Foreign Service personnel, but the A.I.D. officers, the information officers, and the Peace Corps directors, and the station chiefs and so on.

*Q: Did you also feel that in addition to having a cohesive, harmonious country team there at post, that you were receiving unified policy guidance from Washington? Were there policy disputes within the U.S. Government with respect to Bolivia, and if so, what was the impact on your tenure as ambassador?*

HENDERSON: I shouldn't say this, but one of the great advantages of being ambassador to Bolivia is that Washington doesn't pay too much attention to what's going on there until you're in trouble. But I would have to say, no, that generally I did not receive good policy guidance and I don't think its unfair to say that I received, except in rare incidents, little support from the Washington team.

Let me see if I can pick out an episode. Yes. This is one which probably was one that gave me the most difficulty. I won't go into the background details of the episode in Bolivia marked by the Che Guevara incursion into the country. But in the course of that threat to the Bolivian governing group, I was in Washington and I went with the Assistant Secretary of State to the White House to talk to Walt Rostow about what was going on in Bolivia. I said to Rostow that there was one thing that was clear to me, that if Bolivians were able to combat and defeat this insurgency that they would certainly, being Bolivians, look for some kind of a reward and specifically a financial reward, and specifically I would think that they would be looking for something in the order of \$5 million dollars. I was not representing anything that the Bolivian government at the time had told me, but it was just

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what I anticipated would arise when this insurgency was over. And I said, "And when they come to me for this, I don't want people in Washington trying to nickel and dime me to death. This is one where we either have to say yes, or no, and if we say no, then I think you'll have to understand that my mission will be marked as a failure and I'll have to resign. It isn't sour grapes, this isn't anything, these are just facts of life and we have to face them this way." And Rostow turned to the Assistant Secretary and said, "When Henderson's request comes in, make sure that we remember what he said."

Guevara was defeated and executed and the Bolivian government did turn to me and say, "We single-handedly to all intents and purposes defeated a threat to the stability of the hemisphere and now we think we ought to have some compensation and we're thinking in terms of money." And when I transferred this request to Washington and reminded Washington of the understanding I had had, the first thing I got was an AID mission demanding to talk with the Bolivian government to negotiate some form of not compensation, but additional aid, and when I expostulated to the person who was heading the mission I was told, "Look, Guevara is dead, that issue is over."

There's another example of that. There was a time, sometime in the course of my assignment there, when it suddenly occurred to somebody in the Department that we ought to have a policy statement—policy objectives for Bolivia—and they asked me to write my version of policy objectives. And I said, "Well, I felt that the underlying principle of our relationship with Bolivia should be to encourage Bolivia to develop an independent foreign policy consistent with its international obligations." And I got a rocket back saying, "What do you mean independent?" And I sent back an answer saying, "I mean the converse of dependent. I do not believe that it is an objective of U.S. Government policy in Bolivia to make Bolivia further dependent on us." And that ended any question of writing further policy for Bolivia.

Another example of that. I don't know that you ever heard of the— what was it they called it?

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*Q:The CASP program?*

HENDERSON: No, it was a program directed by a group called the Special Group CI (counter intelligence) but really what it was, was Governor Hardman and Robert Kennedy, and a number of the very powerful figures in President Kennedy's program developed after the Bay of Pigs fiasco; and the intent of this group was to evaluate situations around the world in which the Communist threat, so-called, was always endemic and always threatened to become epidemic, and one of the requirements of any country which was so classified was that there had to be a report every three months to this committee as to the status. And the carrot to develop this kind of situation was that if there was a finding by this committee that there was a very real danger, then certain steps would immediately be put in place to assist the mission in combating the threat. So, relying on these guidelines, I asked that we be given a strength, a capability in the upper Amazon area of Bolivia to first patrol the waterways and to undertake information programs in that area, and to develop a capability of monitoring what was going on there; because it was clear to me that this upper Amazon network was being used by the Peruvian guerrilla operations, for example, for their access out of Peru through Bolivia and through the Amazon system out to Cuba. And I requested certain things and I was told no, that that wasn't available to me. So I said all right, if this program can't provide me with what I say is necessary for achievement of my objectives then I don't see any point to the program. Well, I was called on the carpet with Governor Harriman and Bobby Kennedy and I've forgotten the others, but you can get the idea of what kind of power center I was dealing with...

*Q:Could you recall what time, what year this was?*

HENDERSON: Well, it had to be somewhere between—It couldn't have been much later—it must have been about July-August-September of 1964 I would think about then, yes, because the election in Bolivia, the reelection of Victor Paz Estenssoro, took place and his inauguration took place on the 6th of August of '64, and I went up to Washington after that

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in order to consult as to what was going on and that was when I had asked for these things and got turned down. So I was put on the grill and asked, "What do you mean?"

And I said, "Well, we're being asked to divert my staff to preparing reports which don't achieve anything for me." And I said, "Unless I get something, I don't see any point in continuing these reports. In the first place I don't think that the threat to the stability of the Bolivian government comes from a Communist source. The instability in Bolivia is quite different. It may masquerade sometimes as Communist inspired but it really is a different problem entirely. What I'm trying to get at is the channeling of these Communist resources, not into Bolivia but into Peru where I was most recently assigned, and it is going across the upper Amazon system and there's no patrol up there, they have no way of controlling it, and we have no way of inducing the Bolivian government to control it."

Well, I was in there for nearly an hour and the only thing that I achieved was that they said, "All right, you don't have to write these lengthy reports. You will only have to write one a year unless something occurs in the interim." Its that kind of thing which makes me conclude that for whatever reasons, the Department of State, at least in the areas in which I worked most closely, both in Switzerland where I had some problems too, and in Latin America, is not inclined to back up its missions. It is more influenced by Washington considerations than field considerations in the establishment of policy.

Now, I notice one of your points is what is my most frustrating experience? And I have to say that I was never frustrated in the sense that I despaired. Certainly I was frustrated but frustration doesn't necessarily mean that you give up, you just are motivated to work harder and to go around the obstacle. For example, one of the things that I did was to institute a meeting once a week not with my top staff but with the group that I thought was most capable of grasping what I was trying to get at. And what we were trying to do was to write out our problems in terms that we thought Washington could understand. And we did that for a number of years. And one of the things that we did was precisely that of saying, "How can we tell Washington what it is that we are trying to do."

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*Q: Thank you, Ambassador Henderson, for taking the time to allow me to interview you. This interview, along with the others that are being gathered, will be placed in the archives of The Association for Diplomatic Studies and made available for future researchers and historians. Thank you again very much.*

End of interview